

VZCZCXRO8195
RR RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHHK #2171/01 3290947
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 250947Z NOV 09
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9047
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HONG KONG 002171

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/CM; ALSO FOR DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR MC

SUBJECT: THIRD MACAU ADMINISTRATION: ALL THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES

REF: (A) HONG KONG 1807 (B) HONG KONG 983

Classified By: Acting Consul General Christopher Marut for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Fernando Chui Sai-on will not merely assume Chief Executive Edmund Ho Hau-wah's job December 20, he'll largely inherit his government. Of Macau's ten senior positions, only three will change -- former anti-corruption chief Cheong U will take Chui's Social Affairs and Culture portfolio (being himself replaced by Court of Second Instance Justice Vasco Fong Man-chong), while Ho's chef de cabinet Ho Weng-on will replace Commissioner of Audit Fatima Choi Mei-lei. Choi's successes in ferreting out waste and corruption, including uncovering cost overruns in the 2005 East Asian Games honchoed by Chui, cast an air of suspicion over Chui's decision to drop her. Meanwhile, although the 2009 Legislative Assembly elections were credited with shaking the formerly apathetic Macau citizenry out of their torpor, scholars could not point to a particular demographic or political camp that has gained significant momentum as a result. End summary.

The Throng Remains the Same

¶12. (C) After considerable press speculation about expanding the number of cabinet portfolios, Macau has (perhaps not surprisingly) opted for the status quo. The roster approved by the State Council November 24 (and which will take office with Chui December 20) includes most of Edmund Ho's cabinet:

-- Secretary for Administration and Justice -- Florinda da Rosa Silva CHAN (incumbent)
-- Secretary for Economics and Finance -- Francis TAM Pak-yuen (incumbent)
-- Secretary for Security -- CHEONG Kuoc-va (incumbent)
-- Secretary for Transportation and Public Works -- LAU Si-io (incumbent; replaced the now-imprisoned Ao Man-long in February 2007)
-- Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture -- CHEONG U (former Commissioner Against Corruption)
-- Prosecutor General -- HO Chio-meng (incumbent)
-- Commissioner of Audit -- HO Veng-on (former chef de cabinet for Edmund Ho)
-- Commissioner Against Corruption -- Vasco FONG Man-chong (former Justice of the Court of Second Instance)
-- Commissioner General of the Unitary Police Service -- Jose Proenca BRANCO (incumbent)
-- Director-General of Macau Customs -- CHOI Lai-hang (incumbent)

(Note: the Legislative Assembly elects its president without reference to Beijing (in 2009, selecting LAU Cheok-va to replace the retiring Susana CHOU Kei-jan), while the President of the Court of Final Appeal (SAM Hou-fai) does not change with administrations. End note.)

¶3. (C) Continuity has clearly trumped all other considerations. Although her personal integrity was never questioned, Florinda Chan was viewed by many as ineffectual and as more of an adjutant to Ho. Francis Tam, who we had thought was likely to move to the Macau Foundation (ref B), and Ho Chio-meng were both tipped as potential competitors to Chui for the Chief Executiveship, although neither ultimately entered the race; Ho Chio-meng's popularity far outstrips Chui's. In past, contacts had suggested Edmund Ho's cabinet might stay in office simply due to a lack of talent at senior levels. At a recent lunch with the Acting Consul General, however, Macau Inter-University Institute scholar Eric Sautede suggested that there was in fact no shortage of people with subject-matter expertise who were actively burnishing the requisite "patriotic" credentials. The issue, Sautede ventured, was whether Macau's famously cliquish establishment was willing to "cut more people in."

¶4. (C) That Fatima Choi will lose her job as Commissioner of Audit (akin to the Government Accountability Office) has raised eyebrows. Media are suggesting a connection with Choi's uncovering a 1.4 billion pataca (USD 175 million) cost overrun in the 2005 Macau East Asian Games, which were headed up by Fernando Chui. While acknowledging that concern, University of Macau scholar Eilo Yu suggested Chui's objective might have been gracefully moving Ho Veng-on out of the chef de cabinet position to bring in his own person, and that the Choi issue was unintended collateral damage. "I have to stress that I respected her personal will," Chui told the press, implying the decision to step down was Choi's. Choi herself conceded to the press she had discussed whether

HONG KONG 00002171 002 OF 002

the Commission of Audit needed "new blood," but denied that she had proposed stepping down or that she and Chui had discussed seriously her departure. A career civil servant not yet at retirement age, Choi is eligible (and clearly seems to expect) reassignment.

¶5. (C) A lesser buzz has surrounded Vasco Fong's appointment as Commissioner Against Corruption. Fong's sister, Fong Mei-lin, was reportedly friendly with now-imprisoned former Secretary for Transportation and Public Works Ao Man-long. Media reported Ao gave Fong Mei-lin "luxury gifts" including a Tiffany diamond worth 290,000 patacas (over USD 36,000). Fong Mei-lin later testified at Ao's trial. Vasco Fong acknowledged the link, but stressed that Macau had laws "to prevent conflict of interest." Despite both these issues, Chui emphasized that "efforts to fight corruption" and "sunshine government" would be cornerstones of his administration's policy.

¶6. (C) No change in personnel seems to presage no change in core government policies for at least the near term. Speaking with the Acting Consul General November 20, new Legislative Assembly Vice President (and National People's Congress Standing Committee Member) Ho Iat-seng consciously chose "stable" (wending) over "good" (hao) to describe both the incumbent government and the coming transition.

Looking Out for Number One

¶7. (C) In the runup to the September Legislative Assembly elections (ref A), Macau seemed to be shaking off its former political apathy, with greater political debate particularly in cyberspace and new political movements pushing for democratic reform. When the smoke cleared, however, scholars suggested little had changed. Neither IIUM's Sautede nor ERS e-Research pollster Angus Cheong Weng-hin could point to any single demographic that appeared more energized following the elections. Youth mobilization in particular proved disappointing: Sautede reported only one of the students in his first-year political science course had actually voted.

Cheong told the Acting Consul General that individuals from a range of social sectors and age groups might have chosen this moment to get involved, but the motivation was likely either a demand for better governance (which crossed political party lines) or to protect individual vested interests. Looking at the New Macau Association, the only pro-democracy faction to come out ahead in the elections, Cheong suggested their core support was not youth motivated by democratic ambitions but emigres in their 40s and 50s who had suffered repression on the Mainland and wanted something better.

MARUT